

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

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O R 011230Z MAR 75
FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3137
INFO AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

S E C R E T SAIGON 2240

STADIS////////////////////////////////////

EXDIS

FROM HABIB

E.O. 11652: XGDS
TAGS: PFOR, CB
SUBJ: CAMBODIAN DEFENSE

1. I DISCUSSED QUESTION OF MEKONG OPENING AND PHNOM PENH DEFENSE WITH
AMBASSADOR DEAN AND GENERAL PALMER. THEY BOTH BELIEVE AND I AGREE
THAT EFFORT TO OPEN MEKONG SHOULD BE POSTPONED IN FAVOR OF DEFENSE
OF PHNOM PENH, PARTICULARLY TO ASSURE KEEPING POCHENTONG OPEN.

2. HOWEVER, IN DOING SO, FANK MUST RETAIN POSITION AT NEAK LUONG
WHICH CAN BE RESUPPLIED AND SHOULD KEEP PRESENCE AS POSSIBLE
ELSEWHERE SO AS NOT TO RELEASE KC FORCES ON MEKONG FOR USE
AGAINST PHNOM PENH.

3. THIS QUESTION CAME UP INDIRECTLY IN PRIVATE CONVERSATION I
HAD AT LUNCH WITH ADMIRAL SARENDY, KHMER NAVY CHIEF, WHO
IMPRESSED ME AS A MAN WHO KNOWS HIS BUSINESS. SARENDY MADE IT
CLEAR HIS FORCES ARE WEAK ON RIVER, WHERE THEY HAVE SUFFERED
HEAVY LOSSES, AND NEED GROUND FORCES WHICH ARE NOT AVAILABLE TO
CLEAR THE WAY. HE EMPHASIZED OBVIOUS IMPORTANCE OF KEEPING
POCHENTONG OPEN AS HIGHEST PRIORITY.

4. FINALLY, SARENDY, FANK COMMANDER FERNANDEZ, US MISSION MILITARY
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AND CIVILIAN STAFF AND OTHERS WERECONFIDENT THAT PHNOM PENH

PERIMETER, INCLUDING POCHENTONG, COULD BE HELD IF US MATERIAL
SUPPORT SUSTAINED. THIS JUDGMENT WOULD BE REINFORCED IF FORCES WHICH
MIGHT OTHERWISE BE USED IN ATTEMPTS TO PUNCH THROUGH ON THE MEKONG
ARE INSTEAD USED AROUND PHNOM PENH.

5. IN SUM, I SEE NO NEED TO TRY TO OPEN MEKONG CONVOYS AT
THIS TIME, IN FACE OF PRIORITY AND REQUIREMENTS FOR PHNOM PENH
DEFENSE.
MARTIN

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NNN

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